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COMBATING SUICIDE

accepts the Lamarckian view of heredity, which obviously suits better his biological-sociological parallel.

The general value of this book lies in the careful formulation of the parallelism between biology and sociology. Dr. Worms has made the book of interest not only to the student of these sciences but to the casual reader as well by his wealth of illustration and his clarity of style.

The Problem of Combating Suicide.—(Prof. Dr. Guilio Q. Batlaglini, *Schwizerische, Zeitsch. für Strafr.*, 24th year, No. 2.)¹ The problem of this article is, Can the criminal law act effectively against a person who attempts suicide or one who aids in the attempt or has previous knowledge of it?

The practice of confiscating property to deter was abandoned because ineffective and obviously unjust to the relatives of the suicide. Fining or imprisonment of would-be suicides would have practically the same effect. The attempt in England and America to make attempted suicide a misdemeanor has been ineffective. The Italian law does not attempt to punish suicide or the attempt to suicide, but holds guilty the one who aids or has previous knowledge without an attempt to prevent.

The threat to punish can have no deterrent effect on the suicide, because he is planning to get beyond the state's power to punish, consequently it is not an act for legal consideration. It is rather a question for morals or social ethics. The writer argues for the right of the individual to departure from a given habitation by suicide as well as by migration. A country cannot well compel a man to stay in it. Consequently no legal reaction should follow the act of suicide or the suicidal attempt.

On the other hand, the legal attitude ought to be one of attempting to relieve conditions leading to suicide as far as possible. Among such opportunities for preventive action the writer mentions the suppression of the suggestive details in the press reports of suicides. There is no longer any question in regard to the power of suggestion over the mind already half disposed to self destruction. Such repression has been advocated by private bodies in several countries. The legal prevention of the sale of poisons, except on the order of a physician, accomplishes little on account of the wide commercial use of poison in the form of insecticides, etc. The prohibition of the sale of dangerous weapons accomplishes little as long as men work with dangerous tools. Society cannot well prohibit the sale of rope or the building of two-story houses or prevent the use of illuminating gas. The thousand and one opportunities offered by the country itself and the forms of industry make suicide easy to the man who has determined to die. The state can only prevent to the extent of relieving itself from the charge of negligence. Education could do much and the state might help materially in affording abundant opportunities for healthful recreation and social diversion. The suppression of suggestive literature would certainly be a legitimate field for state action.

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